

AMERICAN CITIZENS SERVICES
American Citizens Services Newsletter

U.S. CONSULATE GENERAL MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA
July 2010

This periodic email newsletter is a service to U.S. citizens who live in or are travelling through the consular district of the U.S. Consulate General Melbourne, which comprises the States of Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and the Northern Territory. Through this American Citizens Services newsletter, the Consular Section highlights information pertaining to consular procedures, policies, and other topics of general interest to U.S. citizens who have registered with the American Citizens Services (ACS) Unit and provided an email address. If you believe others would benefit from receiving this newsletter, please forward it to them and encourage them to subscribe. To subscribe to our periodic newsletter and receive other updates, please email: MelbourneACS@state.gov

You may also wish to [register online](#) to receive other State Department updates including travel warnings.

If you do not wish to receive this periodic newsletter, or would like to be removed from our email list, please email MelbourneACS@state.gov with UNSUBSCRIBE in the subject line.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[CHANGES IN CONSULAR FEES INCLUDING FOR U.S. PASSPORTS FROM JULY 13](#)

[REDESIGN OF STATE DEPARTMENT CONSULAR AFFAIRS SITE TRAVEL.STATE.GOV](#)

[NEW LAW MAKES ABSENTEE VOTING EASIER FOR OVERSEAS U.S. CITIZENS](#)

[AMERICAN CITIZEN SERVICES, MELBOURNE – PUBLIC HOURS](#)

[FILING IMMIGRANT VISA PETITIONS FOR YOUR SPOUSE OR CHILD](#)

[INTERNET CORRESPONDENT IN TROUBLE? SPOTTING POTENTIAL SCAMS](#)

[INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE FORMS AND TAX INFORMATION ON LINE](#)

[BRING YOUR OWN PHOTOCOPIES OR PAY THE FEES](#)

[CONSULAR OUTREACH – COMING TO A CAPITAL NEAR YOU!!](#)

[AVIAN INFLUENZA – BE PREPARED!](#)

[ON-LINE APPOINTMENT SYSTEM FOR AMERICAN CITIZEN SERVICES](#)

[AMERICAN COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS](#)

TRAVEL INFORMATION

USEFUL WEB SITES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS

UPCOMING HOLIDAYS AND CONSULATE CLOSURES

Changes in Consular Fees including for U.S. Passports Effective July 13

On June 28, 2010, the Department of State published an interim final rule in the Federal Register which informed the public that the proposed fee changes published in the Federal Register in February 2010, and announced also in our prior ACS newsletters, would be implemented on July 13, 2010, and that the Department would accept public comments on these fees for an additional 60 days, until August 27, 2010. Thereafter, the Department will consider the additional comments and whether changes should be made to the rule before publishing it in final form.

The fee changes apply to certain consular fees, including those related to U.S. passport and passport card applications, immigrant visas, and other services provided to U.S. and foreign citizens.

This interim final rule is distinct from the increased in non-immigrant visa application fees, which came into effect on June 04, 2010.

In order to view the interim final rule and to submit comments, please go to www.regulations.gov.

Redesign of State Department Consular Affairs Web Site travel.state.gov

On May 25, the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs unveiled a new design of www.travel.state.gov that is easier to navigate and more user-friendly. Travel.state.gov is the State Department's preeminent tool for reaching out to the American public about travel safety in other countries, and for you to report your travel plans so that Embassies and Consulates around the world can serve you better. Check out the website's new look today at <http://www.travel.state.gov/>.

New Law Makes Absentee Voting Easier for Overseas U.S. Citizens

On October 28, 2009, Congress enacted the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act. This legislation amends existing law regarding overseas voting in Federal elections, and should make voting easier for overseas Americans.

New Procedures for 2010 Elections

Beginning with the November 2010 general election, and for all subsequent general, special, and primary elections, states will be required to mail out ballots at least 45 days prior to an election for a Federal office. This requirement may cause some states to select earlier primary dates in order to comply with the 45 day mailing deadline, or to request waivers due to special circumstances.

In addition to mailing ballots to overseas voters, the states will be required, at the voter's request, to provide registration forms, absentee ballot request forms, and blank ballots via

fax or email. However, each state's laws determine whether ballot requests or voted ballots can be returned via fax or email. The new law prohibits states from rejecting marked ballots based on notarization, paper size, or paper weight requirements. The witnessing requirements of individual states remain in place.

Overseas Absentee Ballot Requests

Effective immediately, states will no longer be required by Federal law to continue to mail election materials to overseas addresses (even when they are determined to be invalid) for two complete general election cycles on the basis of a single ballot request. It will now be up to each state to determine how long to continue to send out election materials before requiring overseas voters to submit new ballot requests. This change, sought by local election officials, should greatly decrease the volume of voting materials sent abroad to addresses where Americans no longer reside.

State Department Recommendations

In light of these changes, the Department of State recommends that all U.S. voters residing outside the U.S. request absentee ballots from their local election officials at the start of each calendar year, and whenever there is a change of address, change of e-mail address, or change of name, by completing and sending in a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). To locate information on your specific state's requirements, and to obtain an on-line version of the FPCA, please visit www.fvap.gov. FPCAs may be mailed to your local voting officials in the United States via international mail or from any U.S. embassy or consulate. Many states allow U.S. citizens overseas to submit the FPCA by e-mail or fax.

The Department of State strongly encourages all U.S. overseas voters to provide email addresses or fax numbers on their FPCAs to enable local election officials to transmit election materials in the fastest manner available, which should then allow sufficient time for the return of voted ballots. For information regarding your specific state, please visit www.fvap.gov

Emergency Ballots

The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) serves as an emergency ballot for the November general elections for Federal offices, although some states also permit its use for elections for state and local offices. Beginning in January 2011, the new law allows use of the FWAB for primary, special, and runoff elections for Federal offices. Voters who request an absentee ballot

in advance of their state's ballot request deadline, but who fail to receive an official ballot from local election officials in time to vote, should complete the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot and send it back to local election officials in time for it to be counted. An on-line version of the FWAB, together with instructions for its use, is available at www.fvap.gov

Questions?

Voting Assistance Officers at the U.S. Consulate General in Melbourne, Australia, are available to answer questions about absentee voting. To contact the Voting Assistance Officer send an e-mail to VoteMelbourne@state.gov.

American Citizen Services, Melbourne — Public Hours

The American Citizens Services (ACS) section in Melbourne encourages all U.S. citizens seeking consular services who are eligible to apply by mail, such as for renewing passports issued to adults or adding visa pages to passports, to do so. For those services requiring a personal appearance, we have structured our public hours in coordination with the Non Immigrant Visa (NIV) Unit to better accommodate U.S. citizens seeking services after school hours and/or in the afternoons. Please note that these services are by appointment only; [appointments must be made on line](#). Exceptions to this rule include genuine emergencies, such as travel for a death in the family.

The current public hours for Melbourne ACS are as follows:

Counter Service hours (**by appointment only**)

- Monday: 9:00 am — 12:00 noon & 12:30 pm — 3:30 pm
- Tuesday: 12:30 pm — 3:30 pm
- Wednesday: 9:00 am — 12:00 noon & 12:30 pm — 3:30 pm
- Thursday: 12:30 pm — 3:30 pm
- Friday: 12:30 pm — 3:30 pm

Telephone Service hours

- Monday — Thursday: 9:00 am — 12:00

Please note that the Consulate General is closed on certain [U.S. and local holidays](#) and the first Wednesday of every month.

If you have any questions in relation to our new hours please direct them to MelbourneACS@state.gov.

[Filing Immigrant Visa Petitions for Your Spouse or Child](#)

The U.S. Consulate General in Melbourne periodically accepts appointments for U.S. citizens seeking to file petitions for their spouse or child to move permanently to the U.S. Those petitions are then sent to the U.S. Consulate General in Sydney for adjudication and further processing, including scheduling of appointments. Interested persons should email the Visa Unit at MelbourneNIV@state.gov to receive updates on when we are scheduling such appointments. For further information on U.S. immigrant visa procedures in Australia, please consult the [Mission Australia Website](#).

[Internet Correspondent In Trouble? Spotting Potential Scams](#)

The U.S. Consulate General in Melbourne regularly receives emails and/or queries concerning Internet requests for assistance from persons whose bona fides are not clear. To assist U.S. citizens receiving similar correspondence, we provide the following information from the [Department of State website](#).

The Consular Affairs Bureau receives daily calls about international scams involving Internet Dating, Inheritance, Work Permits, Overpayment, and Money-Laundering. Many scams are initiated through the Internet; victims range in age from 18 to 81 and come from all socio-economic backgrounds.

If you feel you have been a victim of an Internet scam, please consult our consular publications for help and send all direct reports of Internet fraud to the Federal Bureau of Investigation at: <http://www.ic3.gov/> . If the scam originated through a particular website, notify the administrators of that website. If you are concerned about an American in distress overseas, but you are not sure if it is a legitimate case, call our office of Overseas Citizens Services at 888-407-4747 (from overseas: 202-501-4444).

- [Resources for Victims of International Financial Scams](#)
- [International Financial Scams Brochure](#) - for information on Internet Dating, Inheritance, Work Permits, Overpayment, and Money-Laundering
- [Spanish Lottery Scam](#)
- [Help for American Victims of Crime Overseas](#)

Internal Revenue Service (IRS) forms on line

Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax forms for preparing annual tax returns are available online at <http://www.irs.gov/formspubs/index.html>. Publication 4732, Federal Tax Information for U.S. Taxpayers Living Abroad, is also available on the Web at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p4732.pdf>.

Please note that the Consular Section cannot provide U.S. taxpayer assistance, specifically in preparing tax returns. We also do not stock or provide tax forms given that those are now available on line. Rather, all queries should be directed to the IRS using the information at www.irs.gov.

For more information on US taxation, you may wish to consult the [Mission Australia Web site](#).

Bring Your Own Photocopies or Pay the Cost

We wish to remind all of our American Citizen Services clients that as announced in our prior newsletters and posted on the Mission Australia Consular Services Web site, photocopies as well as the original supporting documents have to be submitted with all applications for passports, Consular Reports of Birth Abroad, Social Security Numbers and federal benefits. We can photocopy the documents for you; however, this service incurs a fee of US\$1.00 per page.

Consular Outreach – Coming to a Capital Near You!!

The American Citizen Services Unit conducts periodic trips to Adelaide, Darwin, and Hobart to provide passport, registration, and other citizenship services that cannot be performed through the mail. We most recently conducted such visits to Adelaide in April and Hobart in May. Subject to workload demand and funding, we tentatively plan visits to each capital at least once in 2010. While we are committed to trying to provide this service on a regular basis, budgetary restrictions and other constraints may delay these visits. If you wish to register for notices of when a consular officer may be coming to one of these towns for consular outreach, please email us at MelbourneACS@state.gov. The visits are also advertised on our [website](#).

"Swine" and/or Avian Influenza – Be Prepared!

The Department of State remains concerned about the possibility that H1N1 "Swine" and/or H5N1 "Avian" Influenza may affect U.S. citizens overseas and provides extensive information on how U.S. citizens may prepare and protect themselves against the global disease. This includes a Swine/Avian Influenza Fact Sheet, http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1181.html. Additional information may be available at www.travel.state.gov.

On-line Appointment Service for American Citizen Services

Effective November 5, 2007, all American Citizen Services that must be done in person require an appointment. The appointment system allows Americans requiring services to schedule their appointment times in advance, allowing for a greater flexibility of services and reduced waiting periods. Americans are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this service by booking their appointment online. If your service does not require a personal appearance, you will be instructed on how to apply through the mail. For further details, please consult our [website](#).

American Community Organizations

For the reference of U.S. citizens in or traveling through Australia, and without endorsing or recommending any specific club or organizations, the U.S. Mission in Australia maintains a [list of clubs and/or organizations](#) relevant to U.S. citizens.

Travel Information

The Department of State publishes Country Specific Information Sheets, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings for places throughout the world. For the most current information published by the Department of State, including World Wide Caution announcements, please go directly to www.travel.state.gov. To receive this information automatically, please register through the [Internet-Based Registration System \(IBRS\)](#).

Useful Web Sites and Telephone Numbers

The following Web sites and telephone numbers are provided for the reference of U.S. citizens, without endorsing or recommending any organization. The U.S. Consulate General does not accept responsibility for the contents of these sites nor the information provided by these offices.

- * Domestic Violence (24 hours): 1-800-65-6463 (toll free)
- * Rape Counseling: <http://www.casa.org.au> in Melbourne, <http://www.yarrowplace.sa.gov.au/> in Adelaide, <http://www.sass.org.au/> in Tasmania, <http://www.rubygaea.org.au/> in Darwin.
- * For information on Australian visas: contact the Australian Department of Immigration & Multicultural Affairs (DIMIA) at www.immi.gov.au.
- * To obtain Australian birth/death/marriage certificates for all Australian states, visit www.bdm.vic.gov.au.
- * For questions concerning U.S. customs rules and regulations, check out the U.S. Customs website at www.cbp.gov.
- * For information about taking your pet to the U.S., please consult the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) website at www.aphis.usda.gov. You should also contact directly the airline/shipping company you plan to use in order to make arrangements and any required reservations in advance.

- * Social Security Administration: For the latest in social security information, go to www.ssa.gov for news and announcements.
- * Veterans Administration: Obtain up-to-date information about entitlements to VA benefits at www.va.gov. For VA Education Benefits, go to www.gibill.va.gov.
- * Internal Revenue Service: For tax forms and other timely information, go to www.irs.gov.

Upcoming Holidays and Consulate Closures

For a list of upcoming holidays and scheduled Consulate General closures, please consult our Web site at <http://usembassy-australia.state.gov/holidays.html>.

This newsletter is published by the American Citizens Services Unit, U.S. Consulate General, Melbourne, Australia.